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# THE PLANTATION BELLE AND OTHER STORIES

BY

JULIA McLEMORE DIMICK



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## DEDICATION

TO MY MOTHER, WHOSE BEAUTIFUL LIFE  
SHALL ALWAYS BE A GOLDEN MEMORY  
IN THE HEARTS OF HER CHILDREN





## FOREWORD

Most of these stories were written to give as readings when my sister, Miss Addie McLemore, and I were storytellers at the Southern Chautauqua, Monteagle, Tennessee. They served to lighten our otherwise classic programs and enabled us to dismiss our audience with a smile.

J. M. D.



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## BY-GONE PLANTATION—WAYS

Dear Reader :

These dialect stories of pathos and humor, of Negro plantation days, of the Old South, in cotton fields, and sweet-potato patches, sugar-cane rows and "goober"-gardens are from the pen of Julia McLemore Dimick, whose life was lived in "The Big House on the Hill." She knows!

She has given the characteristics of the Negroes as she knew them, saw them, heard them and hired them.

She tested these stories of humor and pathos as one of the "story-tellers" in the Summer-Assemblies of Tennessee.

This testimony is from her life-long friend,—and "near cousin,—"

LIDA B. ROBERTSON





## BEAUTIFUL EUTAW

Come with me to beautiful Eutaw,  
The dearest town you ever saw!  
There flowers are springing,  
There children are singing,  
And churchbells are ringing  
In dear old Eutaw.

Strangers are welcome to old Eutaw,  
The sweetest town you ever saw!  
There are wisteria bowers  
There are roses in showers  
To brighten the glad hours  
In dear old Eutaw.

The sun shines brighter in old Eutaw  
Than any place you ever saw!  
There magnolias grow,  
There sweet violets blow,  
And young hearts overflow  
In dear old Eutaw.

Mocking birds are singing in Eutaw,  
The quaintest town you ever saw!  
Notes from the top of trees  
Float on the Southern-breeze  
Your inmost heart to please  
In dear old Eutaw.

There are shady walks in old Eutaw,  
The shadiest you ever saw!  
There dwell the dantiest girls  
With the sunniest curls  
And with teeth just like pearls  
In dear old Eutaw.

## BEAUTIFUL EUTAW

The nights are so sweet in old Eutaw  
The sweetest that you ever saw!  
There starlight is gleaming  
There moonlight is beaming  
And life is like dreaming  
In dear old Eutaw.

And there are true hearts in old Eutaw,  
The truest that you ever saw.  
So do not be frightened,  
Life's load will be lightened,  
And your last days be brightened  
In dear old Eutaw.



"MARRIED LIFE AINT WHAT IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE."





# The Plantation Belle and Other Stories.

## THE PLANTATION BELLE

Ella, the cook, was the most popular "colored lady" on the plantation. All of the wage-hands were head over ears in love with her, not because of her pretty face, though she was pleasant enough to look at with the bright sparkle in her eyes which told of an abiding humor. Hers was the charm which could always amuse. It has been said all the world loves a lover; it can just as truthfully be stated that all the world loves a good laugh and the person who can create one.

The laborers were dependent on Ella in a large measure for their comfort and happiness, and the Beau Brummel of their number was often heard to remark:

"I don't want to git no closter to de golden-gate of heaben dan dis kitchen door, nor hear a sweeter angel song dan Miss Ella er jokin' us arter our days wo'k is done."

Ella was cook at the "Big-House" and it was the good fortune of the wage-hands to eat in the kitchen, which place was filled with brightness and good cheer by the ever ready wit and efficiency of the genius who presided there.

During the long summer days after the noon meal was over and dishes washed, and shining pans and kettles hanging in their accustomed places, Ella

retired to her own cabin for a period of rest, for in this part of Alabama where the heat is so great, it is the privilege of the servant as well as the mistress to enjoy a quiet hour. Ella usually spent this time among her flowers, often remarking to her friends:

"I couldn't live widout my purties, ca'se when I is pert an' lively, dey smile back at me an' nod dey heads same as to say, 'we's happy too,' an' when I is lonesome an' sad dey seems to know it jist as well, an' tell me to cheer up! cheer up! same as dat red bird what builds his nes' in de rose vine on my gallery."

It was the boast of this ambitious servant that she tried to keep her house "jist as clean as Miss Lizzie's," and she had rugs on her floor and curtains at her windows, even if they were not fine like those in the big house. Of course these things in their own cabins were marvels to the colored people of long ago, and attracted them from far and near.

One afternoon, as Ella was starting from the bored well which was a short distance away, she met Peter Robinson who said:

"Miss Ella let me git you a bucket o' water, I does love to wait on de ladies eben if I is tired."

"Dat's good!" cried the plantation belle, "I's sho gwine to dance at your weddin' fer de kindness."

"Well now, Honey, don't you dance wid nobody but me," was the gallant reply, "I wants you fer my partner all froo life; Miss Ella please fergit Henry an' marry wid me, we'd be jest as happy as june bugs er singin' mong de flowers. We'd jest go er dancin' and er singin' froo life togedder, jest dancin' an' er singin'."

"Go way from here nigger, don't you talk ter me like dat," she cried, "it soun's mighty purty, but married life aint what it's cracked up to be. I's done tried it, an' I knows what I's talkin' about—and Pete I done tol' you I's been married onest an' dat pacified me. I neber spect's ter give a nudder nigger the chance to resert me, again."

"Now, Honey, don't you think ebery man is lak dat fool Henry of yourn. De Lord only knows why you an' him couldn't hit it off togedder—de fault was hisen, an' not yourn. I knows fershow. But dats a long time ago an' it pears to me lak you'd fergit it by now."

"Fergit?" was the vehement reply, "fergit! I'll neber do dat. I loved dat black nigger, I did, an' thought he was de finest piece of spun-silk God had eber made. Come on in de house an' I'll tell you all about it."

When they were seated in the cosy room she continued:

"We was as happy as dem summer days was long 'till dat ole yaller gal comed down here from town an' Henry he was neber de same arter dat. One Sad-day evenin' I had cooked de best supper, turnip-greens an' corn pones an' blackberry-pie what he lubed de best, an' had my cabin shinin' an er blazin' wid flowers for I said to myself, somethin's de matter wid Henry sho, he don't pear to eat lak he did, an' he jest stays away from home when he has been er hurryin' like lightnin' to git here. I put on my prettiest Sunday dress an' sot right out yonder by dat big oak tree waitin' fer him ter come. Well, he didn't gib me no little piece o' smile an' didn't

notice nothin'; didn't even speak to me at first. Arter awhile he says:

"Ella I has done lost my appetite fer you an' fer your cookin'. You is too black fer me, I don't lak no black nigger no longer; my sufficiency has done been surrenciated."

"You is a black nigger yourself" says I, gittin mad mad as fire, "an' you is not only got de black skin, but your heart am black. Git out o' my sight! I hopes I'll neber lay eyes on you as long as I live—an he got! Arter dat I hearn he went up de road ter Bessemer. I didn't see him again in a long time, not till two years ago when I met him out dar in de big road. He lowed his Ma was sick an' he had come back ter see her. He stood a long time er lookin' at me, jest as sad-like, an' den axed me if I'd fergiv him an' let him come home, said he'd never been happy a minute since he left me. I hearn tell as how dat yaller-gal had made him see sights an' dream dreams, an' I sho was glad. I up and said ter him:

"I's done been married oncet—and dat pacified me. I has done los 'my appetite fer a black nigger—*my* sufficiency has done been surrenciated. Jest you go back ter your yaller-gal."

"I turned on my heels an' lef' him standin' right dar. He called me er agin an' er gin but I neber eben looked back. Tho Pete, it was all I could do to keep from runnin' an' throwin' my arms around his dear ole black neck."

After a moments silence she changed the subject: "Did you hear about Jane Freeman?" she asked.

"Yassum, an' Miss Ella, I sho did laugh when I

hearn tell ob de way you got dat money out'n de Governmint, pertendin you can't make no livin' an' making 'tense-like dare ain't nobody to 'sport you, when I knows fer sho dare am moren six niggers as would work day fingers to de bone fer you any day, an I is one ob 'em."

"Well, Pete, when I heard as how Jane Freeman, who is de onlyest person in dis part o' de country as can cook as good as I can, had said she was dependint on her son, Andrew, fer a livin an' de Governmint made him sen' her ten dollars a month an' den made her a present o' ten dollars hitself, an, atter dat she was smart enough ter come back ter her husband, Leff, who is de smartest nigger farmer in Alabama, I says to myself, 'Ella git busy.' De preacher am allus tellin' me 'de Lord will divide' an' now I knows fer sure dis sayin' am true. Henry he writ me er letter sayin' dey wanted him to go in de Army an' begged me ter tell de Governmint I was 'pendin' on him fer er livin an ax'em ter let him come back on de farm 'ca'se its workin' fer de country ter make a good crap ob somethin' to eat same as fightin' in dat outlandish furren-place, what soever de name may be. Henry, he writ a mighty purty letter sayin' as how he had allers lubed me an' had never seed a happy minute since he lost my destitution an' I done gin it to anudder nigger,—fer Pete, he jest will believe I is er lovin o' you 'ca'se you is yaller. I up an' tells de officers o' de Governmint I aint got nobody ter wuk fer me—I didn't say I wus better able to make er livin' 'an most o' de men in de country. All de same I wanted my husband, Henry, to jine de Army if dey would sen'



me ten dollars an' make him do de same lak Andrew Freeman," she chuckled to herself and added:

"Some folks would say dat aint right. Miss Lizzie de mistress o' de big house at Lizzieville, lowed "its cheatin' de Government, an' dats de same as stealin' " but Aunt Kizzie, who am de biggest shouter in our church lowed it's carrying out de Scripture injunction o' let not your lef' han' know what your right han' am doing."

"Well I declare!" cried Pete, "I neber would er thought o' de meanin' o' dat Scripture."

"What's a Jersey Belle, Pete?" Ella asked suddenly, "I made our preacher mad las' week an he lowed I was a Jersey Belle'. I knows I is de plantation belle 'ca'se I can cook so good an' wont marry none ob you. Men is curious critters,—if you wants em to lub you, jest tell 'em no."

"Well, Miss Ella, what roused the parson's cop-  
orosity?" asked Pete.

"He begged me ter marry him an I says, 'Ole Big Liza wants ter git married, why don't you buck up to her?'"

"An dat saint o'de Lord flew all to pieces an' lowed I was a Jersey Belle."

"Pears lak none of ob us is de court-er your Henry was," Pete remarked mournfully.

"No sir ree!" Ella replied, "an do you know, Pete, I may forgive dat nigger yet if he comes outen dis War an' shows hissself a man; an' if he don't—! Oh Pete! at night I can hear him callin' and callin' jest as he did out yonder in de road when I laughed an' tol' him ter go back to dat yaller gal."

She crossed her arms on the table before her and

bowed her head in an abandon of grief. Pete eyed the woman sadly and a great sympathy welled up in his heart; he touched her hand softly and said:

"Dar now, don't you cry, Honey,—Honey he'll be back; de soldiers is already comin' home from France. Did I tell you I seen Andrew Freeman yes-tiddy?"

There were foot-steps outside the cabin door and Ella went quickly to the window:

"La! Pete! here he is! He aint daid. Here's my man, he's done come home to his Ella,—praise de Lord! praise de Lord"!

But when Henry appeared in the doorway, she drew herself up sternly and asked:

"Here, nigger, is you been to see dat yaller-gal?"

"No, I aint," was his reply, "an I hope I'll neber lay eyes on her agin while I live."

"Well, come on in dis here house an' don't you neber go away no more!" she answered happily.





A ROAD LEADING TO THE CHURCH.





## AUNT MARIA'S COURTSHIP

Aunt Maria don't you want to attend church this morning?" I asked my old nurse one beautiful Sabbath-day.

This question had been asked many previous Sundays and the same reply was invariably received:

"Naw, Honey, I don' want to go to no church. I ken praise de Lord right here in dis kitchen jest as good as I kin in dat dare church."

"Aunt Maria," I said, "tell me why you never go to church, your friends seem to get comfort and pleasure from your preacher's sermons, why do you not care for them?"

"Well Honey my young master, your brother, what was de best lawyer in dese here parts, is daid, an' I aint got nobody to plead my case when I gits in trouble."

She folded her fat black arms and eyed me shrewdly then continued.

"It was dis way, me an' Big-eyed Anne, we was a courtin' Sam Spriggin, who was as likely a nigger as yer ever seen, if he was 'slew-footed.' One Sunday-mornin' many year ago, I had a new dress what was de prettiest thing, you could shet yo' eyes an' dream about—white wid great big red roses sprinkled all ober it. Well I goes to church and gits dar late on purpose, you know, and dar sets Sam right jam up by big-eyed Anne! I sails by an' takes de seat right in front ob dem so day both kin see me

good. I turns my head coquintish-like ah' ses, 'Sis Anne I hopes yo' is well dis morning'. Arter she looks me ober she almos' has a sinkin' spell. I knowed in reason her heart was failin' 'er, but she ses, ses she, 'Why Sis Rea, I' is toler'ble, how is you?'

"I feel jist as fresh as dis here May mornin', thank de Lord," I answers, "an Bro-Sam," I ses, tossin' back my head, "how is yo' good health?" "Sis Ria," ses he, "I sho is proud to see you' an' you sho is lookin' 'snipcious dis here day, an' den he whispers in my year, "I never seed you lookin' so purty."

"By de time de preacher got to 'thirdly'—he was er preachin' about de only 'nigger' mentioned in de Bible, Nigger-re-demus you know! Bless yo' heart dat ole nigger Sam was er settin' by me instid o' Black-eyed Anna! Jealous? You ought to er seed her! She was natcherly black but she turned green an' purty soon she couldn't stand it no longer. She jest spit tobacco-juice right on my beautiful red sash an' cross de drapery in my back! I tried to wait 'till de preacher got thro' wid his sarmon—but he sho did preach a long time. When he got to 'ninthly' I tol' Anne to come out o' dat church an' I tried my best to kill 'er when we got in de yard. I was no thin faceted nigger like her, an' I was about to beat de spite an' stuffin' clean out'n her when Sam runned-up an' says, 'Ladies! Ladies! you have done fit enough. Do calm yourselves down an' stop.'"

"Look here, nigger," I ses, "I'll pitch sumthin' at you, if you fool wid me."

"He jest give me de sweetest smile an ses, 'Now, honey, don't you pitch nothin' but your lov' an' I'll ketch thet.'"

"Then I knows in my heart he is mine. Well, dey arrested me an' Anne—but my! I didn't keer. Dere was a great big oak tree jest outside o'de jail-house an a mockin' bird was er singin' up in its branches fit to split his little thoat, but de song my heart wus singin' was sweeter still, for it was all about Sam, an' his ketchin' my love.

"I sarnt for my young master. Yas-sum dat was befo' your brudder died, an' I told him all about it, an he got me out o' jail an made Anne pay for ruinin' my dress. Den Sam an me, us got married, an' we had de bigges' weddin'! I invited Anne too, but she didn't come. Your Ma she give me a purty white dress an' I had o'ange blossoms in my hair. I sho did look pretty and fine."

"I never is been to church since then, chile'. I been skeered to go, ca'se I knows in reason if I does go, I'll dress fine and make all de niggers jealous, an' I ain't got nobody to git me out o' trouble since my young master died."





"DAR AINT NO PLACE DIS SIDE OB DE PEARLY GATES OB HEAVEN AS IS  
AS SWEET AN' PURTY AS, DIS HERE FIEL' IN DE SPRINGTIME."



## THE BIG HOUSE ON THE HILL

Springtime had come in old Alabama. On a certain plantation the flowers were blooming and the birds were singing. From a nearby woods floated the odor of wild honey-suckle and yellow jasmine.

An old negro man who was ploughing, stopped, sniffed the air and murmured "Dar aint no place dis side ob de pearly gates ob heaben what am as sweet an' as purty as dis here fiel' in de springtime." His eyes wandered to a distant hill where stood out—dream-like—a stately mansion against the deep blue sky. The old man continued: "Dey say Ole Massa's home is done been sold ag'in. It sho takes de life out ob dis ol' black body ob mine, fer to see strangers in dat big house on de hill. But who is dis er comin' cross de fiel'? Neber did see him befo', but he is quality, sho as I's born."

A splendid young man approached and spoke to the old negro who replied: "Sah? Yas sah, I can wuk de flowers, I used to be gard'ner fer de mistiss 'fo de war. Marster, he died two years atter de s'render, an' Mis-tiss she took de young Marster an' de little Miss an' went ter Californy. Marse Phil was jis' a little boy when dey lef' de big house up dah on de hill."

"It was guring de destruction period when niggers was turned loose on de country er lyin' an' er stealin' an'er killin', an some on 'em doin' wus, same as beastis in Affaky, an' Mistess said as how she wus skeered to stay at Weston wid her precious boy an'

gal when de country wus in sich er condition. So she gin me de deed ter dis little piece ob groun' here, an' my cabin dah, an' sol' de ol' home an' went er way. Few years atter dat, I hearn she wus daid. Yas, sah, she grieved hersel' ter death fer de marster; I lowed she would, when he died."

"I couldn't sleep nor eat nor wuk nor do nothin' fer er long time atter de white folks went away, an' Vi'let—dat's my wife, sah,—an' as puttier gal as yer eber see in dem days- but peared ter me lak she didn't have no heart. Us 'sponsible niggers, dem what tried to do right, yer know, had a mighty hard time, an' come putty nigh ter starvation. Ca'se us didn't have, nobody ter tell us what ter do. An' would yer blieve it, sah? Vi'let wanted ter wuk fer anybody as could pay her wedges! Who, me? Naw sah, I neber wuked fer nobody but quality in my life, an' neber specks to; you don't kitch old Green er waitin' on no poo' white trash!"

"Vi'let an' me, us had bitter words, an' one day I driv her out'n my house. I said ter myself if she wusn't true ter her white folks, she wouldn't be true to no nigger, eben if he wus her husban'.

Wist I could tell you jist what I passed tho' atter Vi'let left. De sun it 'peared to stop er shinin', an' I can't see a vilet till dis day, widout a sharp pain in dis ole black heart ob mine. Dis here bed ob vi'lets, dey wus hern; but I dug 'em all up atter she went away.

"Long time atter dat, I begun to hol' up my haid an' wuk dis groun' an' de Lord he sho did bless de labor ob my han's. I wuked partly to show Vi'let I could make a livin', an' seein' things grow some-



how made me fergit my troubles. Peared lak I could see my daid Mistess, who gin me dis lan', er smilin' in eve'y growin' plant an' flower. I got so busy I made sho I'd done fergit Vi'let.

"One day I got a letter, de gentleman down ter de postoffice brung it ter me; said as how he wus passin' dis way an' thought he'd bring it er long, as I neber comed ter town. I axed him if he'd be kind enough ter read it ter me. De minute I see dat letter I knowed in reason suppen wus wrong. Was it fer to tell me my young Marster was daid? Den I had visions ob my los' Vi'let er dyin' 'fore my eyes an' I know fer de fust time, all de little fortune I done laid by, aint nothin' ter me. I jist want Vi'let, an' dats all in dis world I want."

"Yas sah, it wus fer to tell me she wus dyin' an' would I come ter say Goodbye. I left at oncet, but when I got ter Mobile she wus a breathin' her last. She knowed me though, thank God, an' I neber will fergit de look she gin me, it was so full ob love an' pleadin'. I fell right down on my knees an' axed 'er ter forgive me, fer I, knowed in reason I could neber fergive myself. How this collar chokes me!—"

"She died wid her arms around my neck, sah, an' I brung her home an' buried her right out dar under dat big oak tree. Yas sah, she's er sleepin' under them vi'lets whar I can watch her grave, an' de breaf o' dem flowers can go right up ter heaben an' tell her I am sorry, an' as how I'm comin' ter her someday."

"What did yer say sah? You say You's my young Marster, an' is don' married, an' bought de ole home an come back ter live at Weston? De Lord be

praised! Now ole Green, he's ready ter die. Sah? Yer say I mustn't die, but live an' help yer an' de young Mistess make de ole home what it used ter be? Thank de Lord! Thank de Lord; lemme go wid yer ter de house right now."

## OCTOBER IN ALABAMA

Golden rod am er bloomin',  
Swee' gum leaves is so red  
You could sware a flame ob fire  
Am burnin' ober your head.  
Goobers is er ripenin',  
Cotton fields is so white,  
De niggers feel like pickin'  
An' singin' all de night.

Taters is er sweetenin',  
An' as fer de golden corn,  
I neber see sich er sight  
Since de day dat I was born!  
Git your banjo, nigger,  
We'll dance to de sign o' de moon,  
An' den we'll tree a 'possum  
An' kitch dat big-eyed coon.





"I WAS HOUSEMAID AN' NUSS FOR MISS WARD."



## THE ROMANCE OF ELVIRA JONES

"Elvira, this is beyond endurance. When Aunt Maria left me to visit her sick son, I thought I could depend upon you to cook for me until her return, and now your escapades have culminated in your being summoned before the Mayor's Court. Explain your wild conduct."

Elvira was a pretty mulatto girl who stood with downcast eyes before me.

"You seem to be quiet and orderly, " I continued severely, "how do you manage to get yourself into so much trouble?"

"Ma'am, it sho is a long story, but I's gwine ter tell it, if yer say so. When my pappy died, Sallie Anne, my Cousin, dat fat good-natu'd 'oman yer see wid me sometimes, she say "Elviry yer is lef' all alone by yo'self now, you better git marri'd so you'll have somebody to take keer o' you an' wait on yer lak my ol' man waits on me." Ma'am you neber is see no man folks fetch an' carry fur a' o' man lak ol' man Eph do fur Sallie Anne. I thinks to myself, it sho would be noice to have somebody cut my wood, draw my water, an' cook my brek'fas', lak ol' Eph do fur Sallie; so I ax "Who mus' I marry?"

"I knows er man f'om up 'bout Brush Creek what'll marry, wid you,' she lowed. "He's comin' down here nex' Sadday night. I'll fotch 'im ober fer ter see yer."

"I wus house maid an' nurse fer Miss Ward. Well, I gin up my job an' cleaned my own house tell it

sho did shine fer many a day, an' I got me de puttiest dress wid rose buds, what looked des lak yer could pick 'em off on de white crepe, an' den I spent a whole week's wedges er gittin' er supper as would temp' dat man's appertite."

"De Lord o' mussy! I wush yer could er seed 'im when he walk in wid Sallie Anne! my heart sho did sink ter de ve'y bottom er my new slippers, an' I knows in reason de sweet milk er settin' befo' de fire turned ter viniker itself. I neber is laid eyes on sich a ugly man in my nat'ral born life. I wus so mad wid Sallie Anne I could er pitched 'er out n de winder, an' as fur ol' Bill Green, I wouldn't so much as notice him, an' when he sidled up ter me tryin 'ter talk sweet, I jes' hauled off an' knocked 'im in de mouf hard as I could."

"Nex' mornin' Sallie Anne she say "Elviry, I neber is hearn tell o' nobody treatin' er co'tin' man lak yer treat Bill Green las' night." "Look er here, Sallie Anne, don' yer talk ter me 'bout dat nigger, I neber is see nuttin as p'ison ugly as dat man in my born days."

"W'y gal, he aint so ugly. You can't be picky an' choosy in dis here life," she said "spec'ly whar mens is concerned, but Bill, he aint so ugly."

"Aint so ugly!" I cried "Aint so ugly! Sallie Anne, yer hab been er libin' wid ugly folks so long yer don' know ugly when yer sees it. Fer anybody kin tell yer jest ter look at ol' man Eph 'll put er bad taste in yer mouf."

"Look er here, gal," Sallie Anne goes on, "don't yer know de uglier mens is, de meeker dey be? Yer couldn't treat no purty man an' manage no purty



man lak I does Eph, yer'd hafter be waitin' on him an' gittin' *his* bre'kfas' 'ste'd o' him cookin' yourn."

"Well," says I, "it 'pears ter me I'd radder be doin' a few things myse'f, than to be lookin' at ol' man Eph or Bill Green de res' o' my life, so jest put dat in yo' pipe an' smoke it, Sallie Anne Johnsing."

"Den a vision ob Jim Lewis riz up befo' me. Jim he's tall an' straight an' sho wus good to his wife when she wus sick an' poo'ly so long, an' wouldn't notice nobody nuther, till he'd laid her away under de sod. When she'd been ceasted a short time, Jim he 'peared ter hol' up 'is haid an' take notice. It sho wus cuyus, but he neber would look at me, he wus allus er cuttin' his eye at Liza Waller, dat ol' gal what puts on so many airs, an' I knowed in reason I's a better lookin' colored gal dan Liza."

"One day Jim he say "Now dar aint nobody ter home but me, de house sho is lonesome-like, an' I don't stay dar more'n I can help." Den he laughed an' went on "Since 'strictions is done moved, ladies is my fancy, an' I sho is gwine to have a good time, den when I gits ready to sittle down, I's gwine ter marry de bes' little gal in dis here town."

"Well, ma'am, yer neber is hear tell o' niggers gittin' 'ligion as fas' as de gals in dis town did atter dat. De woods wus jes' full on 'em seekin' 'ligion. Liza Waller she lowed as how she'd done come thro' but wasn't gwine ter be baptized 'ca'se she had a bad col'. All on us tol' 'er dat de baptizin' water wus holy an' never done nobody no harm, but Liza she 'most had a conniption fit when anybody talked ter her 'bout it.

"Ter tell de truth, I tried ter git 'ligion myself.

"Does yer 'member de time I axed you what God wanted His chillun ter do an' you tol' me "To love Him an' live right," an' I said "I's a nigger an' I wants a nigger's 'ligion, I wants a 'sperience, I can't even go jine de church, less I've done been ter hell an' done seen heaben in a trance."

"Den you tol' me I was too smart er gal an' been livin' wid white folks too long ter b'lieve in sich nornsense. I studied hard 'bout what you said an' whispered ober an' ober ag'in to myself, "She say Gord, He's my father, an' loves me same as my pappy. He sho sets a lot o' store by me, if He loves me lak my pappy used ter." Den I had sich a pain in my heart I couldn't hardly git my breaf, for I can't study 'bout Pappy widout 'most wishin' I wus in heaben wid him. I don't think I eber will git use ter doin' widout him."

"One Sadday evenin' I went ter a tater diggin'. Jim tuck his banjo along an' Ruthie's Bob wus dar wid his 'corgeon. While de ol' folks dug taters all o' us gals an' boys set on de steps an' in de gallery, er laughin' an' er talkin' an' er gwine on."

"Atter while I jist don't know what got into me. I couldn't no mo' he'p dancin' than a fish can he'p swimmin', not no mo' than a mockin' bird can keep f'om singin' in de Spring when de flowers is bloomin' an' it's time fer dem ter mate. Befo' I knowed what I wus doin' I done forgot all about Jim sayin' he wus gwine ter marry de bes' gal in town, I wus up on dat floo' cuttin' de pig' on wing to de music o' dat banjo, an' when I done fru, I sing a funny song."

"Yer neber is see niggers so scandalized as dem seekers o' 'ligion. Liza, she sho did look glad as she

runned up ter me an' said "Elviry, I thought you done stopped dancin' an' singin' reel tunes." Den she cut her ol' eye 'roun' at Jim an' lowed "As fer me, I wouldn't dance fer nothin' in de worl' an' as fer reel chunes! I's gwine ter sing hym's o' praises de res' o' my life."

"I wish I could tell yer jes' how shame an' sad I felt. Jim, he look lak he wus sorry fer me, an' atter while he call out "Come on, le's go see how dey're gittin' on wid de tater diggin'."

"De sun wus jes' beginnin' ter set, an' de sky looked like de ve'y gates o' heaben done open out befo' our eyes. I say to myself "Look er here, Elviry Jones, dar aint no gates o' heaben fer you in dis life, nor de life ter come, you done ruined yo' happiness here an' hereatter, er dancin' an' er singin' reel chunes."

"Somebody dug up er tater 'bout big as my head an' lowed "Dis tater is split open an' looks ugly, but it sho will taste jes' as good as dem purty ones ober dar."

"Jim he looked at me an' said "But a feller likes somethin' as is good ter look at. When a man marries he wants a purty 'oman an' it 'pears ter me I'd ruther have a purty tater eben if de ugly ones do taste de same."

"Liza she flounced herse'f 'roun' an' say "Many er man have felt dat way befo' ter his sorrer'."

"Dat night Jim he walked home wid me 'ste'd o' Liza, an' she wus so mad, she looked lak she'd bu'st wide open!

"De nex' day bein' er Sund'y all on us got fru wid de white folks wuk an' had time ter walk de street befo' sundown. Atter supper, a whole passel o' us

gals an' boys went ter de depot ter see de train run. I wus stan'in' by Ruthie's Bob. Us calls him Ruthie's Bob 'ca'se him an' her wus marri'd an' she got mad at 'im an' went up here ter Tuscamaloosa an' marri'd annudder man. Ma'am? Yes'm she loves him yit an' he loves her so, look lak he's gwine ter lose his min', but neither one on 'em wont give in. I allus felt sorry fer Bob an' treated him nice when de gals an' boys teased 'im.

"Atter a while somebody call out "Here she come showin' her face in de winder!" an' sho' nough No. 2 rolled in.

"She sho is puffin' an' er blowin'," Bob said, an' den Bill Green dat ol' ugly nigger Sallie Anne wanted me ter marry wus stan'in' dar makin' eyes at me. Yes'm, atter I done knock 'im in de mouf. He lowed "Pears ter me she's er pantin'. I speck she's tired ca'se she sho is come a long way."

"While us wus laughin' an' talkin' an' a gwine on like dat, Ruthie she stepped off n' de train wid her new husban' right in behin' her. Poo' Bob! but he got out n de way befo' even Liza Waller could laugh an' call ter him.

"All o' us went f'om de depot ter de church. Yes'm dat church down by de ober head bridge. Jim he'd been er keepin' company wid Liza Waller, but now he 'peared ter ruther be wid me. He stepped up an' axed me if he could see me ter church. My heart wus beatin' so lowd I sho wus skeered all de peoples would hear it.

"When us got ter church, dey sing an' pray, and sing an' pray, an' atter while de preacher got up ter renounce his tex'. He lowed, "I knows what I'm

talkin' er bout. John de Baptis' wus a Baptis', he wasn't no Methodis' no Prisbyte'an, nor Piscopalyn. Gord, He moves in a mischievous way His blunders ter perform!"

"Ma'am? Yes'm he wus sho a fine preacher, he tol' dem niggers some straight fac's, an' when he got thro' his sarmon, some o' de peoples wus er singin' an' some on 'em wus er shoutin' an some on 'em wus moanin' an' some wus er prayin'! As fer me, I wus skeered ter go home. I don't b'lieve I eber could er gone thro' dat dark lane down dar by de railroad if Jim he hadn't been wid me. I felt like de debil wus hidin' 'hin' some o' dem big trees jest waitin' ter jump out an' grab me, I wus such er sinner dancin', an' singin' eve'y day songs 'ste'd o' hym's.

"Jim, he hel' my han' right tight an' said "Viry, little gal, don't you be skairt, 'taint no harm fer you ter dance an' sing. De Lord, He put dat gay life in yo' heart, He aint gwine ter hol' you 'sponsible. As fe me, I's thinkin 'bout what a good time we's gwine ter have when we gits marri'd an' you comes ter keep my house f'om being so lonesome-like. Yes, Viry, I is gwine ter marry de ve'y bes' little gal in dis here town, eben if she do dance an' sing reel chunes."

"Bout dat time Liza an' a whole passel o' folks kotch up wid us an' Liza she stood right in front of me an' dared me ter push her away.

"I said "Look er here gal, I aint done nuthin' ter you. You better leave me 'lone! Git out o' my way, nigger!" Den fust one an' annudder say somethin' an' eve'ybody began ter push an' scuffle an' fust thing us knowed all on us wus 'rested.

“De Mayor say as how he’ll let me off dis time if you will write him a note an’ I’ll promise not ter be so disorderly no mo’, an’ I sho is gwine’ ter stay home an’ min’ my own bus’ness f’om dis time on, ca’sse Jim an’ me, us is gwine ter git marri’d nex’ Sad’day night.”



"LISSY, SHE'S EDICATED, BUT SHE'S A GOOD GAL IN  
SPITE O' DAT FACT."





## THE CHRISTMAS WEDDING

That year we seemed to have springtime in the autumn and it lingered until late December. The peachtrees were deceived by the balmy air and put forth hundreds of pale pink blossoms. Spring roses were never more beautiful than those I arranged with loving touch on the back verandah that Christmas-eve morning. While thus engaged I heard voices which floated to me from the near-by kitchen:

"Tek a seat an set down, Bro. Bob, lemme giv you some coffy, it tas'es good to me both winter an' summer 'ca'se when it's col', coffy gits you het up, an' when it's hot, somehow, coffy cools you off. But I don't want nobody to give me no coffy in no cup, Bro-Bob, no coffy in no cup. I wants my coffy in a bucket or a pan."

"Yas-sum, yas-sum," Bob replied with gallantry, "hit sho do give it a extry flavor for to know you's got enough." And he continued, "Did I hear as how you had trouble down to de church last night?"

Then Aunt Henrietta, the cook, told the story of her daughter Malissa who had just been married.

"You don't know Lissy's full name so I is gwine to tell you. Lissy, Mandy, Squashshaw from Virginny. You see I named her Lissy for my ol' mist'ess, Miss Malissa, an' I named her Mandy for de prettiest doll you ever see what I had in Virginny when I was a little gal befo' us moved to Alabam'; an' I named her Squashaw for my favorite vegetable, what some folks calls kershaw, an 'I named her from Vir-

ginny for my dear native state—dat little piece o' heaben on earth, dear ole Virginny."

"Now ain't dat plumb beautiful!" Bob murmured with deep enthusiasm and Henrietta continued:

"When Lissy was a little gal, she loved music so, I 'lowed she would be a museum when she growed up—and she is, can't play very well on de organ—but Lord a-mussy you ought to hear dat gal sing! She can make a markin-bird shame o' he-self any day. When Lissy she come home from school all de females in dis parts o' de country both married and single, dey jes tremble in they shoes or else thar barefoots! for all de mens an' boys flock aroun' Lissy same as bees buz about honey. But she didn't seem to keer for none o' dem till Johnnie Billings come home. He left here when he was a little boy an' he didn't come back 'till he had done growed up, an' been edicated an' turn preacher. He come to help Bro' Morrison in a retractable meetin', and he had the de curios-est idees, he didn't want nobody to shout nor moan nor groan nor do nuthin' but set still an' listen to his gab. Johnny he love Lissy from de very fust an' she was crazy 'bout him. Now Lissy is edicated, but she is a good gal in spite o' dat fact, 'ca'se everytime she goes away from home an' comes back again, I beats her fur to keep her in her place, and fur to show her her mammy is smarter than she is—even if I aint edicated. My ole man an' me, us is mos'ly like one pea in two pods, him and me, ca'se I's not only his wife, but I is his 'finity an' when I told Lissy I didn't want her to marry no edicated preacher, but she must marry a plain workin' nigger what could give her plenty to eat an' beat

her now an' then to keep her in her place, would you believe it? her pappy took sides wid dem' chil-lun and tried to git Lissy to marry Johnnie anyway, sayin' to me, "Oh Ret let de gal have Johnnie, he's a good boy an' she loves him." I was so mad I felt like I would bus' wide-open. Las' night Lissy, she beg me fur to go down to de church an' hear Johnnie preach an' I said "You stop pestering of me gal. I ain't studyin' you nor Johnnie,—nor your pappy neither, all of you are agin' your poor ole mammy;" den she jes' hug me roun' de neck an' say, "Don't you say I am agin you, mammy, I do everything you tell me; haven't I even told Johnnie I will never marry him agin your word? Tho' the Lord knows I love him an' will never have nobody unless I can get Johnnie, he is all I want in this world,—all I want!"

"Well, when Lissy begins to coax, you jes' as well go straight an' do what she says,—of course I went to de church wid her, course I did. I was er settin' thar feelin' kin' o' mad an' injured like, (ca'se I didn't want to go), when de singin' started-up. 'Joy to de world de Lord am come,' was de fust hymn, and Lissy sho did sing sweet. Arter while she snuggled up to my side an' slipped her little black han' in mine,—and, Bro-Bob, I jest couldn't be mad no longer, no matter how hard I tried. Johnnie, he show can preach, an' when he got het up an' begun to tell dem niggers about dat fust Christmas-eve, when de Lord fum heben come down to earth an' was born in a stable wid de beastis aroun', an' de angels er singin' an' de wise men er bringing thar presents,—tho it don't 'pear to me dey were

wise, if dey had been wise, seems to me dey would er brought dat blessed child some vittles an' clothes 'stead o' all dat insects an' myrhs—whatsoever dat may be. Howsoever, I was settin' thar beginnin' to feel mighty happy, an' didn't blame ole a'nt Kesiah one bit when she gin a long moan,—an' cut loose!

"Now thar ain't no nigger in this country as can make as much fuss as A'nt Kizzy when she shouts. Befo' she could give one of her loudest yells, Johnnie come down outen de pulpit and stood beside her. "Now sister" he said, "we don't want no demonstration here, this is jes' a quiet hour for praise an' prayer an' Christmas meditation."

"She never so much as noticed him, an' arter while she begun to rock to an' fro and lowed, 'I hearn Gabriel blow his trumpit!'

" 'My dear sister you must be quiet,' said Johnnie, 'an' besides dat ain't de truth; Gabriel did *not* blow his trumpet, an' 'it ain't right for you to say he did,—when he didn't.'

" 'Look-er here, Brudder!'" Bill Blair called out, 'You let dat sister alon', you don't know what she hearn,—she might o' hearn Gabriel give a toot or two, an' you let her alone or I's gwine to beat you.'

"Bill, he is a elder, an' de folks felt lak dey ought to take sides wid him, an' yet dey loved Johnnie so dey wanted to take sides wid him. Dey jes' didn't know what to do. Johnnie, he spoke up jes' as mannerly an' lowed:

" 'Brudders an' sisters, I ain't arter no fight, an' I refuse to fight in de house o' de Lord, but if anybody wants a turn or two wid his fists, let him meet

me down by de overhead-bridge when this meetin' is over,—an' I'll try to give him satisfaction."

"Den Bro. Bob, I seen thar was goin' to be trouble sure enough, an' I riz up an' made my fust speech in de meetin'-house: 'Brudders an' sisters,' said I, 'I moves dat we think about de peace an' de goodwill dem angels was singin' about so many years ago, an' I moves also dat dis meetin' be turned into er Love-feast an' a Christmas-wedding. Come here Bro. Johnnie Billings you'll be de bride-broom, an' dis little gal o' mine, she'll be de bride.'"

"My ole man he call out loud an' clear, 'Thank God for dat! Praise de Lord!'"

"An' I put Lissy's han' in Johnnie's, an' our precaher in good an' reg'lar standin' made dem chillun man an' wife right dar."





"I IS GWINE TER 'FORM ATTER CHRISMAS."





## A CHRISTMAS REFORMATION

*by Addie McLemore*

"Sara Jane Harris! You ain't gwine ter dat Babblin' Water Brook No. 2. Naw yer ain't; I is put my foot down on et, yer ain't er gwine. What does specterbul niggers want wid sassieties? Dat is jez zactly what day is, 'sass sieties,' day don teach yer nuffin but ter sass de nateral head ob de fam'ly."

At this juncture of conjugal information there was a peal of irrepressible laughter from the irate Sara Jane.

"You looks lak de head ob de fam'ly! Ha! ha! an' ain't got sense 'nough ter know A frum Z. Yer no bet'en yer grandaddy whut cum frum Afker, head! head! don't 'scuse me uv havin no sich er head!"

With a little widening of the nostrils, and a toss of her shapely head, Sara Jane looked a thoroughbred, preparing for a race. How different her spouse; there was an apology in his whole aspect, excepting his name, which was Robert Bruce Harris; his words were the only large thing about him, and they, like oil on troubled waters, were soon borne away by the billows of wrath that emitted from Sara Jane.

"I is gwine ter de Babblin' Water Brook No. 2, ternite, en er hund'ed sich heads es you, can't keep me frum it, Bob Harris!"

"Dat is jes hit, babblin', babblin'—der good Lord knows when de babblin' is gwine ter stop. 'Fore

dis 'siety cumed up I wus de head uv er happy family; now I feel de devil wus at de head uv hit."

This was too much for Sara Jane; with another shriek of laughter she said, "I's glad you is found out what yer is, dat is zactly it, de debble roar erbout might'ly when you tries ter be de head."

"Den Sara Jane, you must be de debble, cause yer does der roarin'," said Robert Bruce on the defensive, with an apologetic grin as if afraid of his own boldness; and well he might be, for there was a terrible storm arising on Sara Jane's face, and her expansive bosom rose and fell tumultously.

"Look here nigger, you ain't talkin' ter no common stock uv niggers. I is from Verginny, an' er Virginny lady, ef I wus fool 'nough ter marry sich es you."

The valiant Bruce saw that he had overrated his strength, so to cover his defeat gracefully, he began in a conciliatory voice, "Now, Sara Jane, you know I never meant nuffin'; you is my darlin'. I ain't furgit whut er fine man I wus ter git sich er wife es you; dar ain't er-nudder-sich 'oman in dis country, look you, but, darlin', yer ain't gwine ter nite wid Henry Levy! Promise yer ole man dat yer won't go wid dat rascal, en I don' kere ef yer do go." But Sara Jane was not to be condoled in any such way.

"I ain't er gwine ter promise no sich er thing; Henry Levy is one ob de 'Babblin' Brooks,' an' one ob de bruders in de 'siety."

"Babblin' Brooks he is," said Robert Bruce. "It would take all der 'Babblin' Brooks' in de country ter wash de babblin' lies out en his babblin' tung."

With this outburst, this inheritor of a noble name

assumed all the dignity that his small figure, small head, small eyes and altogether small appearance could muster, and marched out of the abode he called 'home,' leaving vacancy behind, for there was always vacancy for Sara Jane, unless there was something masculine to either flirt with or scold, often both at once. This fondness for masculine admiration was the one discord that troubled their domestic happiness. Robert Bruce was an unassuming little darkey, his name being so weighty, he was unable to grow in any way, he invariably looked and felt smaller after each unsuccessful battle to assert his rights as "head ob de family," he was honest to the "back-bone," as he expressed it; and was fully alive to the charms of his wife, but insanely jealous of Henry Levy, who had been an admirer of Sara Jane's before their marriage, which had taken place some eighteen months before the period of our story.

Sara Jane was 'house maid and cook,' and a merrier hearted negress could hardly be found in the broad, sun-shiny region of the South; coquetry and love for teasing was daily bread to her. When she had exasperated her husband and he had fled before the enemy, as in this occasion, her countenance would lighten up with a smile of conscious pride. "Well Robert Bruce is er bigger fool 'an I thought he wus, the idea uv me goin' ter de "Babblin' Brooks" wid Henry Levy!, I hed jes es soon go wid de debble an' be don' wid hit. Well dat is all right, it do cum ter no good ter let yer ole man res' too easy, keep him er leetle uneasy, ef yer want ter manage him wid out much self sacrificial trouble, an' whut is der use o' lettin' er man know he occupies

de topmos' place in er 'oman's 'art? He gits too masterful. Men is masterful pursons any how, but 'omons lack men dat much der better fur it. Robert Bruce Harris is er little man, but golly!, he kin talk big! Well, I does lub ever inch uv his black hide, an' dare is no mistake erbout dat, but he don' know dat, ha! ha! 'en I don' 'ten' fur him ter, yit, I speck I mus 'form a'ter Crismus,—dat is jes' it, I'll 'form a'ter Crismus, dis is October! I'll 'form a'ter Crismus."

Thus soliloquioing, Sara Jane tied her gaily colored bonnet, donned a red shawl, and wended her way to the celebrated society of 'Bablin' Brook No. 2. A few hours later Robert was roused from his slumbers, by much loud talking and hilarious laughter; there were many "good nights" exchanged, a very pronounced "good-night Brudder Levy," which provoked much laughter, this being a great joke, as "Brudder Levy" was nowhere around; the words being intended to reach, and arouse the jealousy of the valiant, but subdued Bruce. A moment later Sara Jane entered with a broad smile on her face, which was not lost on her husband, as he groaned aloud in anguish, and turned his face to the wall. There was a tender remorseful softening of her eyes, as she stretched forth her arms to him, all unseen, and came a step nearer; but the tenderness broadened into a smile of mischief, the arms fell to her side, her lips parted into a whisper, "I's goin' 'ter 'form a'ter Crismus, dat's soon 'nuf."

The next morning as Sara Jane was busy in' 'de White Folks house' there came two consecutive shots of a gun from "the quarters;" like wild the darkies

ran hither and thither, screaming as they ran, "Bob Harris is shot! Bob Harris is kilt." She paused a moment to listen, then as the words reached her, she dropped the dish of cookies, threw up her arms, with one wild cry of despair, and rushed like a mad thing to where he lay, prone upon the floor, lifeless. Oh! What a cry of agony rent the air, "Bob, darlin', speak ter me! Jes' one word, listen, Bob, I lub you!, Oh! My God, let 'im hear me! Let 'im look at me! Jes' once! hab mussy, Oh, hab mussy!, I lub you, Bob! kin yer hear me? I 'tended ter 'form' a'ter Crismus; n' now you is gone, g o n e , g-o-n-e."

She had fallen lifeless across his body; tender hands lifted, and bore her to her own little house, no longer 'home'. For days she lay in a stupor, only moaning, sobbing, and crying out as in a nightmare, "Oh! Lord, let 'im speak ter me, I lubs yer, Bob, 'tended 'ter 'form a'ter Crismus." The latter seemed the burden of all her woes.

When she at last became conscious, her anguish was most pitiful; one could hardly reconcile this wreck of humanity with the merry hearted, buxom, bright Sara Jane of a few weeks ago; her melancholy eyes gazed fixedly into vacancy; she noticed no one, nothing; rarely spoke, when she did it was only to shiver, draw the coverlet closer, look besearchingly around and whisper, "Oh! Lord, let 'im hear me, I 'tended ter 'form a'ter Crismus."

She never slept; remorse sat like a vulture, eating her life away, the one unceasing cry was, "I 'tended 'ter 'form."

Christmas came but not with its usual merry-making. Even the smallest children in the quarter

stood in wild-eyed amazement; something unusual was happening. Unusual? No, the end of all! A soul was leaving its habitation of clay, seeking that home. 'Not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

There were sorrow stricken groups here and there, weeping over the departing friend, for these sons and daughters of Africa are a warm hearted folk.

In the far corner lay Sara Jane, moaning, crying out in her despair.

All at once friends watching near, saw a glorifying expression cross Sara Jane's face: holding out her emaciated arms, she cried, "Bob, is dat you? Done come fer me? You know I lub you, Bob? I 'tended to 'form —at-ter—Cris-mus."





"WESTON WAS BEAUTIFUL FOR SITUATION, AND THE JOY OF THE WHOLE  
MCLEMORE CLAN."





## AUNT POLLY

I can see my childhood home through the mist of years.

"Weston" (located near Boligee Alabama) was beautiful for situation and the joy of the whole McLemore clan.

The house was an old Colonial structure which stood on an eminence, and was surrounded by wonderful shade trees. Well kept hedges bordered the walks and gardens where flowers were always blooming and birds were always singing.

Prairie queen and cherokee roses climbed to the tops of tall trees and fell in festoons to the ground, a mass of glorious bloom in the springtime. There were vistas where one could catch fascinating glimpses of the surrounding plantation and low lying country. Of course there was a summer house (every southern home had one in those days) covered with honey-suckle, yellow jasmine and roses, a retreat where lovers might go and plight their vows amid this beauty and fragrance. Weston has undergone some changes since the time of my story but is still beautiful. The place is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. William J. Hester, Mrs. Hester being the daughter of Mr. Joel T. McLemore the writer's brother.

There were other lovely residences in the community, "Hill of Howth" set like a gem among its shrubs and flowers, the stately Johnston place which is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Henry T. Bouchelle.

Lizzieville, named for the sweet-young girl who grew like a flower amid its beauty and perfume, and later was brought by my brother a happy young bride to Weston. On a far away hill gleams beautiful Myrtle Hall, whose artistic mistress in the long ago, had landscape gardeners come from Washington, D. C., to assist her in the grouping of plants and flowers.

Several miles east of Boligee near Forkland (the name suggested by its being the fork of two rivers, the Black Warrior and Tom Bigby) stands lovely Thorn Hill, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Innes Thornton.

The stately Anderson place is in close proximity, this is now the property of the Johnston family. Not far away is exquisite Rose Mount among her lakes and hills. Mrs. Lagaré, the present mistress of this estate, has repaired and almost restored Rose Mount to its pristine beauty.

These magnificent homes, and many others, are redolent with memories of those who played a conspicuous place in the gay life of the old South, and have become important factors in the building of our new south.

With the many scenes and forms of long ago, memory ever calls up the small bronze figure of Aunt Polly, always faithful, always true. She came with my mother's family (the Colemans) from Virginia some years prior to the war between the States and never forgot she was an F. F. V.!

The mistress said to Aunt Polly at the close of the war, "Now you are free, Polly, and may go where you please and do what you like." "Whar is I

gwine, Mist'ess?" questioned the former slave, her eyes flashing. "With your people," was the reply. "We have nothing but this house and plantation, and with no one to work the land we cannot afford to pay servants. Then you know the master has been ill ever since he returned from the war. Yes, dear Polly, go with your people."

"My people? My people? Why mist'ess, since my ol' man Peyton died three years ago, I aint got no folks but you an' dese here white chillun. Don't you know all de niggers is er leavin' dis place? What is you gwine to do? As for me, I's gwine to stay right here an' cook fer you, an' my gal, Sarah, she will be house-maid an' nuss. Ab, he can job about de place an' work some lan'. Polly an' her fambly is sho gwine to stay here. Do you know eben ol' Burrill is movin' out? I met him out in de road an' axed whar he was gwine an' he said "I is gwine whar I's gwine; I don't know whar I is gwine, but I wants to show black an' white I is a free nigger an' can do what I please.' 'Burrill' says I, aint de marster an' de mistress allus been good to you, givin' you a house to live in an' close to wear an' plenty to eat? Aint you been sickly all your life an' aint dey done had de doctor come an' paid him an' bought your medicine, what for is you gwine to treat 'em like dat?" 'I jist wants to show black an' white I can do what I gol durn please,' sez he, an' de Lord only knows whar dat ol' fool nigger is gone," she finished in great disgust.

A few years later, many of the former slaves returned and found work and a home on the plantation. Uncle Burrill came back broken in health and spirit and the mistress cared for him to the end.

The master lingered several years after his return from the war and when he died, Aunt Polly (seeing the mistress in her widow's weeds) felt at once that she had not manifested the proper respect to her own husband, Uncle Peyton, when he passed away several years before. "Mistress," she coaxed, "I wants a black dress an' a veil fer to wear an' show folks as how I is a widder too. Las' week a stranger axed me if I was a widder, an' I sho did git mad! A widder? sez I, well, I speck I is; if you could have heard me hollerin' when my ol' man died you would 've thought I was six widders!"

It was in vain the mistress suggested the appropriate time for wearing mourning is immediately after the death of a relative, Aunt Polly was obdurate and so it transpired that ten years, after her bereavement, she shrouded herself in black and found great comfort and satisfaction in her sorrow. This contentment was not of long duration, however, for the widow's heart was soon turning to thoughts of love. Colored people feel that matrimony is the chief end of man and of woman, it matters not whether the marriage is good, bad or indifferent, to wed is the all important thing in life! To verify this statement, allow me to digress.

Years after the events recorded above, when we two children who were born after the war had grown to womanhood, we had some cousins who frequently visited us at Weston. These girls, with my sister, Addie, composed a charming trio. They had many suitors but preferred to live in "single blessedness," much to the chagrin of the servants on the

plantation, who eyed them curiously and asked such questions as the following: "Aint you all never gwine to git married?" Is you gwine to live wid your mas all de days ob your life?" "Why don't you marry some o' dese here young bucks what comes in droves fer to court you, dat is what I wants to know!"

The mistress having a perfect understanding of the negro's viewpoint of life, was not surprised when Aunt Polly said before the expiration of her first year of mourning, "Mist'ess aint it time fer you an' Polly to take off dese here black close an' hol' up our haid's an' take notice ag'in?"

"Take notice of what, Polly?" the mistress questioned.

"Take notice o' de gent'mens to be sho, an' git annudder husban'! You aint neber been married but once't an' what is once't? dat's what I want to know. As fer me, I would have been married three or four times since my ol' man died if it hadn't been fer my boy, Ab, as is deaf an' dum'. Pears like he can't bear fer his mammy to eben look at no man, an' I is skeered it would give me bad luck since Ab is deaf an' dum'."

"Polly that sounds like you would gladly follow the example of old Smart, who has had five wives already, and I dare say is urging you to become number six. Is that the direction your matrimonial wind is blowing?"

"Well, Mist'ess, Smart he lows jest as long as de Lord will take, so will he; aint dat right?"

"Polly" exclaimed the mistress in surprise "I believe you love old Smart!"

"Now, Mist'ess, I cant say as I is in love wid dat nigger, but he show is mannerly. He ought to be a Virginny gent'man but he aint, he is Alabama born an' bred, more is de pity. Do you member las' week when he had dat awful col' you gin me some o' your home made wine fer him? Well, Mr. Joel an' Miss Mattie was on de back verandy an' begged Uncle Smart fer to give a toast an' what do you th'ink he said?

"Show as de grass grows roun' de stump my true love am a sugar lump," an' when de young massa an' de little missy left, Smart he cut his bright beady eyes at me an' gin me a bow same as I was a queen an' whispered 'Dat is de truth, Miss Polly! Honey, *you* is my true love an' you sho am a sugar lump! Now Mist'ess don't you know he ought to be a Virginny gent'man? but he aint; he aint nothin' but a Alabama nigger born an' bred," she finished sadly.

"He seems to be an adept in the art of winning hearts and making women lose their heads. Polly, I suppose you will be wanting to marry him soon?" the mistress asked.

"Yes'um I does feel kin' o' pecul'ar an' funny when dat ol' nigger comes 'roun', but he is got ten chillun as don't want him fer to marry no more, so I don't know what I is gwine to do. My gal, Sarah, wouldn't min' me havin' annudder husban' ca'se she wants to marry herself, but Ab—it show would go hard wid him, an' he deaf an' dum'. No, ma'am, Mist'ess, I don't know as I'll marry Smart, but it sho is a pity he is Alabama born an' bred."

A short time after this episode, Aunt Polly became so absorbed in the approaching marriage of her



daughter, Sarah, that Uncle Smart and her own matrimonial prospects seemed to fade in the background. This was to be the "stylishesht weddin' as eber happened on de plantation." The mistress lent a helping hand in all the preparations, bidding Sarah take a whole week for the honeymoon. "No ma'am" cried the maid "I is gwine to be right at dis here house an' make your fire de nex' mornin' attar I gits married. Do you think I'd let annudder nigger wait on my mist'ess?"

True to her word, the smiling bride appeared early the day after her nuptials were celebrated.

"Sarah, I hope you will be very happy" the mistress said, "tell me all about the great event."

"Lordy, mussy Mist'ess, you neber is heard tell o' sich a weddin'! Folks come in crowds from all parts o' de country an' all of 'em lowed I was plumb beautiful in dat white dress you gin me an' wid dem orwange blossoms on my haid. Don't you talk about dat big white cake, an' dat gran' supper! De cake was de mostest fun to cut wid de boys an' gals er scramblin' ober de ring, de dime an' de thimble. Lord if we didn't have a good time! an din us danced till nearly daylight."

"Sarah, what about Joe? You have not mentioned the groom."

"Lordy mussy, Mist'ess, do you know dat ol' fool nigger aint neber come dar yit?"

"Why Sarah, you cannot mean that Joe did not come to his own wedding!" the mistress exclaimed in astonishment.

"No ma'am, he sho didn't, but all de same it was de grandest weddin' as eber tuck place in dis here

part o' de country" and the would-be bride beamed in satisfaction at the golden memory.

Aunt Polly always related her most thrilling experiences to her "white chillun."

"Come here," she said one day, "I wants to tell you 'bout gwine down to de free niggers' church las' Sunday. I is allus been a member ob my marster's an' mist'ess church an' speck to be as long as I lives. De upstairs is set apart fer de colored peoples, you know; an' us can go dar' an' pray an' listen an' eben take communion wid our white folks. Some o' de niggers wasn't satisfied wid dis, dey wanted a church o' dey own. Well, de folks dey is been workin' tryin' to git de debt paid off atter de church was built, an' las' week ol' Liza an' Lee lowed de niggers had axed dey white frien's fer to help 'em, an' ebery cent was paid off. Sunday, dey said, would be a big day, wid dinner on de groun' an' a gran' preacher an' sich singin' as neber had been heard in dis part o' de country, would I come down an' worship wid my own color? I said yes, I'd like to come an' see what was gwine on.

I dressed myself up fine an' when I got dar, de folks was so thick in de yard, you couldn't hardly stir 'em wid a stick. I tried to push tho' de crowd an' dem young bucks an' nigger gals wouldn't so much as notice me, an' I got plum' furious. I sez to dem, sez I, "Look here niggers, aint you got no manners? Don't you know quality when you sees it? Step aside an' let Miss Riddle pass by. I is a dark skin white lady f'om Virginny. I was Polly Coleman what married Mr. Riddle, I aint no common nigger! Git out o' my way, I is a widder! Atter



awhile I got inside o' de church an' sot down kin' o' quiet like, but purty soon de folks began to sing an' shout so you would've thought bedlam was done turned loose. It look lak dey neber would let dat preacher say one word, finely he got up an' waited, but de singin' an' de shoutin' went on. Atter a'while he cut loose an' began to bawl louder than de peoples could shout, so dey got quiet an' gin him a chance to preach. Chillun, I didn't see nothin' gran' about dat sermon, I believe I could have done better myself. I wants you fer to know I could understand ebery word dat nigger said! De folks said as how he was a fine preacher, but dat aint what I call fine. I was so disapp'inted I didn't know what to do, so finely I up an' come home, an' I neber speck to waste no more time er goin' to de free niggers' church. Fine preacher indeed, when I could understand' ebery word he said!"

"Mist'ess," remarked Aunt Polly one day, "you know we let Sarah fix up herself an' de little gals las' night for to skeer ol' man Lee on his way home? Well, he an' Liza son't fer me dis mornin' lowed both o' dem was mos' daid. I hurried ober dar soon as I cooked breakfas' an' foun' dem ol' niggers in baid. Lee said as he come th'ough de woods he saw fifty ghosties which was twelve foot high an' white as snow, an' had flamin' eyes like coals' ob fire. He said dey jest marched among de trees, he did, an' called him. At fust he was so panic struck an' his knees was so weak, he couldn't run nor do nothin'. One by one dem ghosties called him by name an' tol' him fer to come on to de graveyard. Lee lowed he jest begged 'em "Please Mars Ghost, don't make me

go to no graveyard whar all o' my folks am buried dey is on de warpath an' er walkin' about dis here night, show as you is born!' Atter while he jest cut loose an' 'runned fer his life, an' when he got home, Liza, she was er singin' an' prayin' by de fire-side. Lee he mos' brokedown de door but caise o' Liza's songs an' prayers, dem ghosties couldn't come in dat house.

"You know, Mist'ess, Liza lows when she got 'ligion an' come th'ough, she walked de golden streets ob de New Jerroosolum an' saw de pearly gates o' heaben, an' she also walked, ober hell on a cotton string an' it didn't break, neither. She saw her own grandma totin' rails fer to build de fire in hell, caise her grandma was a mean ol' 'oman. Dis mornin' Liza said she an' Lee both is show gwine to die, it have done been revealed to her by some o' dem ghosties in de sperit. Now, Mist'ess, dar was only jest Sarah an' dem three white chillun, fer Mars' Joel an' Miss Mattie had done gone to a party in Forklan'! How could ol' Lee see fifty ghosties, will you please ma'am tell me, dat? All de same, dem ol' fool niggers is so skeered dey sho is gwine to die if somethin' aint done, caise dey wouldn't believe a word when I tol' 'em it was jest Sarah an' de chillun. I speck you'll have to go ober to dat cabin an' tell 'em yourself."

"Yes, yes, Polly, I shall go at once and explain the cause of that heavenly visitation" the mistress murmured in a sympathetic voice.

Thus the years passed like a happy dream on the old plantation. Aunt Polly was so active and her heart was so young no one realized she was growing

old until her eyes began to fail. Neither the doctor's skill nor the glasses he prescribed could restore her declining sight.

"Mist'ess" said the old woman sadly "how can I live wid dout cookin' fer you an' my white chillun?"

"Now, Polly, you must not worry" was the gentle reply "I have long ago made plans for your old age. Sarah has quite a gift for cooking and with a little training will become an expert in the culinary art. You shall live in the new cabin just beyond the railroad and have for your very own enough land to plant a garden, some fruit trees and a cotton patch. I have not forgotten your love for digging in the earth, even if you have spent most of your life indoors for my sake. Your two adopted children shall care for you and assist with the work around your place. I trust this life of fresh air and sunshine will soon make a young woman of you."

"Lordy mussy, Mist'ess, you aint meanin' to say you is gwine to give me dat house an' lan' fer my own, all my own?"

"Yes, my dear Polly, they are yours just as long as you live."

It transpired that the beloved old servant spent long contented years filled with the labor she loved and brightened by frequent visits to the "big house" to see her white folks and instruct her daughter in the art of making those delicacies preferred by each member of the family.

As Aunt Polly's white chillun" finished school, one by one and returned to Weston, each received a special visit from the old black mammy. The faith-

ful servant fell on her knees and kissed the hand of her adored young lady.

"Honey chil' I aint gwine to call you chillun no longer, you is my young mist'ess now, you is done gradiated an' knows everything. You was sho de smartest an' mos' beautifulest angel as eber walked de halls o'dat school you went to, now tell your ol' mammy, aint dat so?"

In vain the blushing girl affirmed there were many others who were more beautiful and more brilliant than she, but all to no purpose, Aunt Polly stoutly maintained that no one could equal her child.

"Here, Honey, I is done bring you a present" she continued with a courtly bow as she presented a basket containing lovely fruit, fresh vegetables or a dressed fowl.

At last Aunt Polly grew feeble and was confined to her cabin and then to her bed.

Sarah was dismissed from her work at the house in order to remain with her mother. The mistress came and went speaking words of comfort and cheer, but with misty eyes, as the faithful friend grew weaker.

The end came peacefully.

"Sarah, prop me up an' open de door an' de winder, you say dey is already open? I can't see, but I knows by de feel o' dis han' my mist'ess is sittin' beside me. When I gits to heaben I aint gwine to be skeered, o' de angels nor de archangels, nor de cherrylims, nor de serebims, Mist'ess, but I is gwine straight to my Lord Jesus, fall down at His blessed feet an' tell Him jest how good you is allus been to me."

"Oh, Polly, Polly, do not fail to tell Him how good *you* have been to *me!*" cried the mistress while tears streamed down her cheeks.

"An' " continued the dying woman between gasps "I'll be er watchin' an' er waitin' fer you—an' my white chillun—an' Sarah—an' Ab—an'—an'—" the voice ceased speaking and was silent forever.

Outside, the sunset lights were transforming the world into a vision of heavenly beauty and painting the snow white pear blossoms in gorgeous tints of crimson and purple and gold.

A fitting hour for the passing of a faithful soul.

*THE END*













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